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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8425
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1651
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 5141
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 8729
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 6303
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 4149
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2127
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L RANGOON 000899

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP AND IO; PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/18/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: BURMA: MORE CONVICTIONS; SOLDIERS CLASH WITH
CIVILIANS IN RAKHINE STATE

REF: 07 RANGOON 835

Classified By: Pol Officer Sean O'Neill for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) Political and human rights contacts have told us at least 11 more activists, including Htin Kyaw, were sentenced to between five and 33 years' imprisonment on November 17 and 18. We are seeking to confirm reports that a special court at Insein prison sentenced monk activist U Gambira to 12 years' imprisonment on November 18. These convictions bring the number of persons convicted since November 7 to at least 97. Our contacts in Rakhine State confirmed exile media reports that at least 20 persons were injured after soldiers and civilians clashed in the town of Min Bya on November 11 and 12. Witnesses reported the apolitical clashes began when soldiers attending a festival insulted some local women.

MORE CONVICTIONS

2. (C) Human Rights activist Maung Maung Lay and NLD spokesman Nyan Win independently told us that the regime sentenced at least 11 more activists to between five and 33 years' imprisonment on November 17 and 18. Among those convicted, noted political activist and key figure in the August 2007 fuel-price protests Htin Kyaw got 12 and a half years, NLD member Thein Swe and HRDP member Myo Thant (aka John Naw) got six and a half years, and 16-year-old activist Ye Min Oo was sentenced to five years' imprisonment. Zomi National Congress president Pu Chin Sian Thang informed us that his son, Kyaw Soe, and nephew, Kat Hkat Kwal, received 33 years' and eight years' imprisonment respectively. We are also seeking to confirm that monk activist U Gambira was sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment by a closed court at Insein prison. These convictions bring the number of persons convicted since November 7 to at least 97.

SOLDIERS AND CIVILIANS CLASH IN RAKHINE STATE

3. (C) Contacts in Min Bya, Rakhine State confirmed exile media reports that at least 20 persons were injured after soldiers and civilians clashed on November 11 and 12.

Witnesses reported the clashes began the evening of November 11 when soldiers attending a full-moon festival insulted some local women. Police responded to the incident and dispersed the crowd. The next evening, soldiers based on the outskirts of town returned and began beating civilians on the street. Several local residents reportedly retaliated and a violent clash ensued. According to our contacts, at least 14 people were treated for minor injuries at local clinics while six others were admitted to a hospital in Sittwe, approximately 20 miles west of Min Bya. Local state-controlled media has not reported the incident.

14. (C) While last week's clashes in Rakhine State were not political in nature, similar events have sparked larger-scale political protests in the past. The March 1988 killing of a student during a government raid on a Rangoon teashop is often cited as a key rallying point for the massive 1988 protests that followed. A 1996 hit-and-run on a female student by a government vehicle sparked significant protests in Rangoon. More recently, the September 5, 2007 crackdown by local officials on a small procession of monks in the town of Pakokku helped precipitate the "Saffron Revolution" (reftel). There is no telling if last week's incident in Min Bya will lead to anything more, but it's a reminder that seemingly isolated events can have broader repercussions here given public resentment over decades of abuse by the regime.
VAJDA